United Nations

Press Release

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MONDAY HIGHLIGHTS

- United Nations special mission holds sectoral discussion with Kuwaiti officials; visits sites critical to its mandate. Humanitarian mission sent by Secretary-General arrives in Kuwait.

- United Nations Environment Programme action plan approved to survey and assess environmental damage of Iraq/Kuwait conflict.

- Second round of preparations for 1992 Conference on Environment and Development begins in Geneva.

- Director-General of Food and Agriculture Organization says food must be safe anywhere in the world and traded more freely.

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The United Nations special mission has now commenced detailed sectoral discussions with its Kuwaiti counterparts and has made a number of on-site visits to areas within Kuwait City critical to the mission's mandate. Yesterday, 17 March, the mission conducted a four-hour survey of the city by road and spent some time at sites that were either destroyed or heavily damaged and vandalized. The latter included government buildings, commercial centres and the country's leading scientific and research institute.

The Kuwaiti authorities are giving the mission their full support and cooperation. However, because of the unsettled conditions prevailing as a result of the occupation, the mission is encountering difficulties in discharging its task due to the absence of an effective internal telecommunication system, an extreme shortage of transport and the unavailability of essential records and data which have either been destroyed or are missing.

Meanwhile, the mission sent by the Secretary-General to Iraq and Kuwait to assess the need for urgent humanitarian relief arrived in Kuwait Saturday, 16 March, by a special aircraft provided by the Kuwaiti Government. The mission was received at the airport by the Kuwaiti Minister of State for Foreign Affairs, Nasser Mohamed Al-Sabah, and other senior officials.

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Soon after arrival, a preliminary meeting took place between a multisectoral Kuwaiti team headed by Suleiman Al-Shahin, Under-Secretary for Foreign Affairs, and the United Nations mission, to discuss the modalities of work as well as data required.

The mission has also been invited to survey areas of the capital, including private and public properties, where damage has been particularly heavy, and to meet a cross-section of the affected population.

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A follow-up meeting of United Nations agencies, convened by the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), has established a task force with a 90-day plan to survey and assess the environmental damage of the Middle East conflict.

The cost of the task force was initially estimated at $2.5 million. It is hoped that the funds will come from donor countries, Governments of the region, non-governmental organizations, and the United Nations and its agencies.

Out of the survey and assessment will emerge concrete proposals on what to do about four separate but interlinked areas that require action -- pollution in the marine and coastal areas; in the atmosphere; terrestrial destruction; and hazardous wastes.

The meeting in Geneva allocated responsibilities to a dozen United Nations agencies and other international organizations, including the World Conservation Union and the Worldwide Fund for Nature.

Between 30 and 40 experts will carry out the initial necessary surveys and assessments leading to the action plan which will mitigate, or eliminate, the consequences of the environmental damage. They will be working out of the Kuwait headquarters of the Regional Organization for the Protection of the Marine Environment, which is to reopen tomorrow and which groups all eight countries of the region.

The action plan will go into effect within this week and will place a core team of experts in Kuwait by mid-April. Operations are expected to be in full swing a few weeks after that.

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The second round of preparation for the 1992 United Nations Conference on Environment and Development began today in Geneva.

The Committee devoted to this task will, during its three-week second substantive session, consider strategies to deal with environmental issues that arise within the process of socio-economic development.

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It will examine the underlying patterns of development which cause stress to the environment, and will seek agreement on measures to reconcile economic activities with the need to protect the earth.

Among other topics to be considered by the Committee is climate change, ozone depletion, transboundary air pollution, soil loss and drought.

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The Director-General of the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), Edouard Saouma, said today that consumers are entitled to safe food anywhere in the world, and urged harmonization of food regulations to promote liberalization in international food trade.

Opening an international conference on food standards, chemicals in food and food trade at FAO headquarters in Rome, Mr. Saouma emphasized protection of the consumer from invisible hazards of chemical contaminants, residues of pesticides and other harmful materials. He said food safety was important to developed and developing countries.

According to the Director-General, there must be concerted efforts to overcome present barriers to free trade, including non-technical barriers, between exporting and importing countries.

Organized jointly by FAO and the World Health Organization (WHO), in cooperation with the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT), the conference is attended by over 400 participants from about 80 countries and international organizations.

The conference, which ends on 27 March, will consider measures to ensure safer food and to remove obstacles hindering the annual $200 billion world food trade.

It is expected to come up with recommendations for an overall strategy for the further elaboration of basic scientific evaluations and general standards and requirements applicable to all foods.

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